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SUBJECT: GOJ-NAGO AGREEMENT ON FUTENMA PLEASES CONSERVATIVES, ANGERS

REFORMISTS, PUTS GOVERNOR ON THE SPOT

1. (SBU) Summary: On April 8, 2006 Japan Defense Agency (JDA) Director General Fukushima Nukaga and Nago Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro reached an agreement on a two runway, V-shaped configuration for the Marine Corp Air Station (MCAS) Futenma relocation facility (FRF) to be constructed on the coastal portion of Camp Schwab in Nago. Okinawan reaction to the Nukaga-Shimabukuro agreement has fallen along predictable lines, with conservatives accepting the plan and reformists opposing it. The one notable exception from the conservative camp is Governor Inamine, who has refused to deviate from his refusenik opposition to any plan other than the original (and now obsolete) Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) offshore airbase plan. The GOJ-Nago agreement has dealt another serious, public blow to the argument of reformists and local media that no one within Okinawa will accept a within-prefecture relocation of MCAS Futenma; the first blow came this January when Nago voters overwhelmingly elected Shimabukuro, a candidate who supported a revised "coastal Schwab" plan, over his two competitors, both of whom rejected any relocation of MCAS Futenma within Okinawa. Although the GOJ's focus now appears to be shifting toward persuading Governor Inamine to also accept the agreement, the reality is that with Nago's agreement,

Inamine has become almost irrelevant on the Futenma relocation issue. End Summary.

Conservatives Supporting Nukaga-Shimabukuro Agreement

12. (SBU) Illustrating the Governor's near-isolation within his own conservative coalition, prominent members of the Okinawa LDP have expressed support for last week's agreement, in contrast to Inamine's continued opposition. Typifying the party's reaction, Okinawa LDP Secretary General Kosuke Gushi publicly supported the agreement on April 9, saying that the plan would hasten removal of the danger posed by MCAS Futenma. He added that he highly evaluated the plan because it "satisfies Nago and recognizes the need to have flight routes that avoid flying over people's houses." Okinawa LDP lower house Diet member Osamu Ashitomi hailed the agreement to us, saying he "strongly appreciated this settlement because my electoral district includes Futenma. My constituents will be happy that the air station is to be relocated to a safer location." (note: Ashitomi told us he will shortly organize a "Futenma Relocation Promotion Council" composed of pro-agreement conservative politicians from Ginowan and Nago cities). Conservative mayors from four northern Okinawan towns (Ginoza, Onna, Higashi, and Kin) also announced their support of the "V-plan," on April 9, giving Mayor Shimabukuro some political cover from reformist attacks.

13. (SBU) Privately, most conservatives were not pleased with Inamine's rejection of the DPRI agreement last October over the FRF issue, and had hoped strongly that once Nago and the GOJ announced an agreement, the Governor would not openly oppose it. Inamine's continued opposition is likely to further strain his ties with his own party. LDP Chief Gushi hinted at these strains when he stated on April 8 that he would like to

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cooperate with "the Governor who says he is opposing the revised coastal Schwab plan" and ask him to "change his stance to a plan that respects the Nago City agreement."

14. (SBU) The only cautious comment from within the conservative camp came from the coalition's junior member, the Komei party. On April 10, Komei leader Itosu Tomonori avoided directly publicly supporting the agreement by stating he wanted to see how talks between Governor Inamine and Mayor Shimabukuro progressed, as well as the results of further briefings on the plan to Nago residents by the GOJ.

Reformists and Media Regroup, Launch Three-Pronged Attack

15. (SBU) The opposition "reformist" parties, joined by the local anti-base media, have rolled out a three-prong strategy to counter the agreement by placing their hopes on the Governor's continued refusal to support the agreement; attacking the plan itself; and, failing all else, waiting things out until the Koizumi administration ends and a new leader takes his place. Currently, the reformists and media are focusing their ire on the GOJ and Mayor Shimabukuro, with Governor Inamine so far escaping much criticism (probably because the reformists welcome his continued refusnik stance). The media have begun touting the line that Inamine is the true representative of the Okinawa people and as such has the final decision. At the same time, the papers have encouraged Inamine to continue his opposition to the new plan, hoping to bolster him against GOJ and conservative attempts to get him to change his stance. Among the reformist leaders, Yonekichi Shinzato, Secretary General of the Okinawa Social Democratic Party, commented April 10 that the new plan "does not provide for safety of local residents; it only strengthens the function of bases in Okinawa." Masaharu Kina, Chairman of the Okinawa Socialist Masses Party, said "danger will be increased due to the expansion of the scale of the airbase. Mayor Shimabukuro broke his public campaign pledge." Masaaaki Maeda, Vice Chairman of the Okinawa Communist Party, stated that the Koizumi administration's "hardline" attitude would only lead to opposition from Okinawans; "the Japanese government should give up trying to build a new base in

Okinawa." And Shokichi Kina, leader of the Democratic Party in Okinawa, said Futenma relocation was an issue not just for Nago City, but for all Okinawans to decide.

¶16. (SBU) Maverick independent lower house Diet member Mikio Shimoji told us April 11 that he believed the GOJ, using carrots and sticks, had forced Shimabukuro to agree - in response to pressure from DOD on the GOJ to secure local agreement. This had caused Shimabukuro to make a "hasty decision," said Shimoji. Shimoji also alleged that Shimabukuro's assistants had been spreading campaign money around northern Okinawa municipalities, which had influenced their mayors to support the Nago mayor's decision.

¶17. (SBU) Okinawa's two newspapers are doing their best to discredit Shimabukuro by accusing him "violating" his campaign

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pledge to oppose the previous Schwab-coastal plan. Articles critical of Shimabukuro state that he originally promised Nago voters he would reject the "coastal plan," while ignoring Shimabukuro's oft-repeated campaign statement that he would be willing to consider a revised "coastal plan." Some anti-base activists are agitating for the Mayor's recall, but their effort seems unpromising, since by law a politician cannot be recalled within the first year of his election.

¶18. (SBU) Since the V-plan has adjusted flight routes so that they ostensibly will not pass over residential areas, reformists and the media are finding it difficult to focus on solely on the proposed FRF's safety problems and are turning to environmental and noise issues as reasons to object to the new plan. Nonetheless, since all five principal mayors from the northern Okinawa have signed off on the plan, it remains to be seen how much environmental issues will really resonate with most Okinawans. In a November 2005 island-wide poll, the largest reason cited for opposing the October DPRI agreement (74.5 percent) was concern the GOJ had ignored Okinawans' opinions and forced the "coastal plan" on them - not fear of environmental damage. When it comes to how local residents in the Henoko area feel about environmental harm from the FRF, we have frequently been told by their ward chiefs that they are much more focused on the economic benefits from the FRF for their communities than on environmental damage.

Waiting on Governor to Accept Plan?

¶19. (SBU) With the conservatives and reformists having made their positions clear, Governor Inamine's isolation within his own ruling camp has become painfully obvious. Both after learning of the agreement late on April 7, and again after his own meeting with Nukaga in Tokyo on April 8, Inamine told reporters his opposition to the Schwab plan had not changed. However, he added that he "respected" the agreement, leading some observers to conclude the governor would not lead an effort to block the agreement. If the Governor chooses to confine his actions on Futenma relocation to his current symbolic, personal protest, it is likely he will continue to have no actual effect on FRF construction, since few believe Inamine will be called on to grant planning or survey permits in the short time remaining before his term ends this December.

¶10. (SBU) Nevertheless, the GOJ appears to want Inamine to soften his attitude toward the agreement. Statements by such influentials as senior LDP figure Taku Yamasaki (who said on April 8 he "awaits a final decision from Inamine") carry the impression that without some positive signal from Inamine, the GOJ will not feel it has gained sufficient Okinawan approval to claim success on the FRF issue.

Governor and Others Hoping This Not A Final Agreement

¶11. (SBU) The Okinawa Prefectural Government (OPG) seems to be hoping that this is not the final agreement, thus allowing the

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Governor to avoid being the stumbling block. Inamine's Chief of staff, Reiji Fumoto, told us on April 10 that he was sure "this was not the final plan," acknowledging that if it were the Governor would be forced to do something. Earlier this year, Inamine was warned by fellow conservatives not to worsen relations with the GOJ as this could cut the vital economic pipeline from Tokyo. Thus Inamine may be hoping the current agreement will be stopped before any of its ramifications cross his desk for signature..

¶12. (SBU) Comment. With a background of some three weeks' worth of media stories stressing the "wide gap" between the GOJ and Nago, announcement of the April 8 agreement truly caught most Okinawans by surprise - the conservatives, pleasantly so. The reformists and media have been mightily confounded by the spectacle of five northern mayors blessing the agreement, belying the reformist line that the vast majority of Okinawans will never accept Futenma relocation to Henoko. Whether Governor Inamine will soften his opposition remains to be seen - but whether he does or not, Futenma relocation remains likely to be one of the central issues in this autumn's gubernatorial election to replace Inamine, with the focus being the future conservative candidate's approach. The reformist candidate is virtually guaranteed to reject Futenma relocation within Okinawa, in keeping with longstanding reformist orthodoxy. End comment.

REICH